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SUBJECT: SECRETARY GUTIERREZ AND U.S. REPRESENTATIVES'
OCTOBER 13 MEETING WITH PRESIDENT URIBE

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) In an October 13 breakfast meeting with Commerce Secretary Gutierrez and an accompanying congressional

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delegation, President Uribe thanked the group for U.S. support and urged them to support the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA). He said the FTA will complement Plan Colombia by generating the resources Colombia needs to sustain advances on security and social issues. Uribe reviewed GOC programs to respect human rights, protect union members and human rights activists, and punish those guilty of human rights abuses. He also highlighted the result of the paramilitary peace process-60 key paramilitary leaders in jail and others on the run-and reiterated his commitment to extradite any paramilitary who violates the terms of the peace process. END SUMMARY.

PARTICIPANTS

12. (U) UNITED STATES

Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez
Representative Eliot Engel
Representative Richard Hastings
Representative James McDermott
Representative Gregory Meeks
Representative John Salazar
Representative William Sali
Ambassador William R. Brownfield
Deputy Chief of Mission Brian A. Nichols
Commerce Counselor Maggie Hanson-Muse

COLOMBIA

President Alvaro Uribe
Vice President Francisco Santos
Ambassador Carolina Barco
Minister of Trade Luis Plata

Reintegration Commissioner Frank Pearl
U.S. and Canada desk Chief Patricia Cortes
Accompanying Cabinet and other officials

FTA

13. (SBU) Uribe thanked Commerce Secretary Gutierrez and the U.S. Congressmen for their support, noting that Colombia's progress in recovering control of its national territory from narcotraffickers and the FARC could not have happened without U.S. support. Colombia remains a good friend of the United States; the bilateral free trade agreement would symbolize the permanent cooperation between the two countries. This becomes especially important now, as South America passes through a complicated period. Venezuelan President Chavez and Ecuadorian President Correa talk of a "new socialism" and advocate "new authoritarian constitutions.⁸ In contrast, Colombia shares the U.S. commitment to democratic values, including respect for independent institutions, transparency, and social cohesion. Countries in the region would not understand if the U.S. Congress did not approve an FTA with the United States, &best friend⁸ in the region.

14. (SBU) Uribe said the FTA will complement Plan Colombia by helping to generate the resources Colombia needs to sustain advances on security and social issues. He noted that under his administration, the percentage of Colombians living below the poverty line fell from 57% to 45%. Coverage for basic education rose from 78% in 2002 to 92% today, and the number of children in nutrition programs has climbed from 3.7 million to 9 million during the same period. More than 36 million Colombians now have health insurance, up from 23 million in 2002, and the GOC hopes to provide universal coverage by the end of his term in 2010. The GOC rebuilt 196 towns that the FARC had destroyed, including

Bojaya/Bellavista which the delegation would visit later that day. Uribe said his "democratic security" policy has boosted investor confidence, leading to increased employment, growth, and tax revenue. The FTA remains key to maintaining confidence and consolidating the progress achieved to date.

PARAMILITARY PROCESS

15. (SBU) Uribe reviewed the GOC's fight against paramilitaries, noting that his administration has demobilized 32,000 paramilitaries. Most paramilitary leaders are in jail, and those who remain at large face constant pressure from Colombia's security forces. The GOC has extradited more than 650 criminals to the United States, a world record. Uribe said he has suspended the extradition of eleven paramilitary leaders due to their cooperation in dismantling paramilitary structures. Still, he would extradite them if they continued their involvement in criminal activity or violated the terms of the peace process. For example, Uribe said he removed a major paramilitary leader from the Justice and Peace Law process because he clearly remained engaged in crime. He will extradite him as soon as the USG submits an extradition request. Ambassador Barco added that the paramilitary demobilization has exposed links between these criminal groups and some Colombian politicians. She said 37 legislators await trial for their alleged paramilitary ties.

16. (SBU) GOC Reintegration Czar Frank Pearl said that the GOC has developed a program that works with the demobilized, their families, and local communities. The program conditions the demobilized paramilitaries, receipt of economic, psychosocial and educational benefits on their compliance with the terms of the peace process (i.e. a commitment to confess their crimes, pay compensation, and refrain from criminal activity.) To overcome popular antipathy toward the former paramilitaries, the GOC extends health, education, and employment benefits to local residents

of "receptor" communities as well. Pearl said the Colombian private sector supports the reintegration program, and has financed 56 projects. FTA approval would help the reintegration effort because it would create new economic opportunities.

HUMAN RIGHTS

17. (SBU) Congressman Salazar said most opposition to the FTA in the United States comes from religious and human rights groups, and asked what the GOC has done to address their concerns. Uribe replied that the GOC remains committed "to do whatever we have to do to protect human rights." The GOC recently extended the mandate of the UN High Commission in Human Rights through 2010, and the Inter-American Court on Human Rights will hold a session in Bogota in two weeks. The GOC welcomes the presence of international human rights groups, and the improved security climate has enabled opposition parties to campaign throughout the country. Uribe stressed that despite facing major security threats from the FARC, narcotraffickers and other criminal bands, the GOC has not followed the route taken by many South American countries in the 1970s and restricted political or civil rights. His "democratic security" strategy aims to defeat the FARC by strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law.

ECOPETROL

18. (SBU) Congressman Sali noted the importance of energy security, and asked about the GOC's plans for Ecopetrol, Colombia's state-owned oil company. Uribe said despite the recent trend in South America toward state control of petroleum and other natural resources, the GOC recently sold 20% of Ecopetrol's shares to private investors. Over 520,000 Colombians bought shares, with local pension funds acquiring a substantial stake. The GOC believes that the partial privatization will encourage greater transparency and less corruption. The GOC did the same with the state-owned telephone company, and the results were dramatic. Service

improved, workers received their salaries on time, and corruption fell. Uribe noted that with oil exports are excluded, Colombia runs a trade deficit with the United States.

LABOR UNIONS AND IMPUNITY

19. (SBU) Congressman Engel thanked Uribe for his strong support for the USG, and said that the U.S. Congress has an obligation to work with our allies. Still, he stressed that many Congressmen want to see the GOC do more to address violence against labor unions and to include unions in the policy process before they will support an FTA. Engel added that several Colombian union leaders have complained that they did not participate during the FTA negotiations, and he asked if the GOC would renegotiate some of the deal's provisions to address union concerns. Congressman McDermott added that ending impunity in murders of labor leaders remains essential.

110. (SBU) Uribe reiterated the GOC's commitment to protect union members and to prosecute those responsible for violence against them, noting that the number of unionists killed fell from 256 in 2002 to 60 in 2006. The latter figure largely reflected fighting between the FARC and the leftist ELN. To date, only 21 unionists have been murdered in 2007. The murder rate for the general population now tops the rate for union members. Still, Uribe said one trade union murder is too many. He described the GOC's protection program for human rights activists, union leaders, journalists and other threatened individuals. In 2007, the GOC will spend \$39 million to protect over 6000 Colombians, including 1500 unionists. He added that his "democratic security" policy

will continue to improve the overall security situation.

¶11. (SBU) Uribe stated that the GOC continues to support the efforts of the independent Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia) to investigate and prosecute crimes against unionists. He had doubled the Fiscalia's budget between 2002 and 2008, and will add \$40 million in 2008 to strengthen the Fiscalia's Human Rights and Justice and Peace Law units. The Human Rights unit contains the special sub-unit that investigates priority cases. Since 2002, the Fiscalia resolved 52 cases of labor violence resulting in 108 convictions.

¶12. (SBU) On labor unions' inclusion in negotiations, President Uribe emphasized that the GOC had invited the unions to participate in the talks. Some groups had accepted. Others, such as unions representing public employees, had refused to participate based on ideological concerns. He noted that Colombia has accepted the labor and environmental changes in the FTA proposed by the U.S. Congress, and added that the GOC also funds the International Labor Organization (ILO) office in country. Asked by Congressman Hastings if the FTA had been a major issue in the 2006 presidential elections, Uribe said the he had made the elections a referendum on the FTA. The GOC closed the FTA negotiations with the USG during the election period, and he made a nationally televised speech highlighting the importance of the agreement.

AFRO-COLOMBIAN CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

¶13. (SBU) Congressman Meeks said he had spoken with Congressmen Lewis and Rush, and both expressed interested in working with a proposed Colombian civil rights commission that addresses the needs of Afro-Colombian. Uribe reiterated his interest in the proposal.

¶14. (U) Secretary Gutierrez did not clear this message.
Brownfield